MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

HOUSTON W. LOWRY

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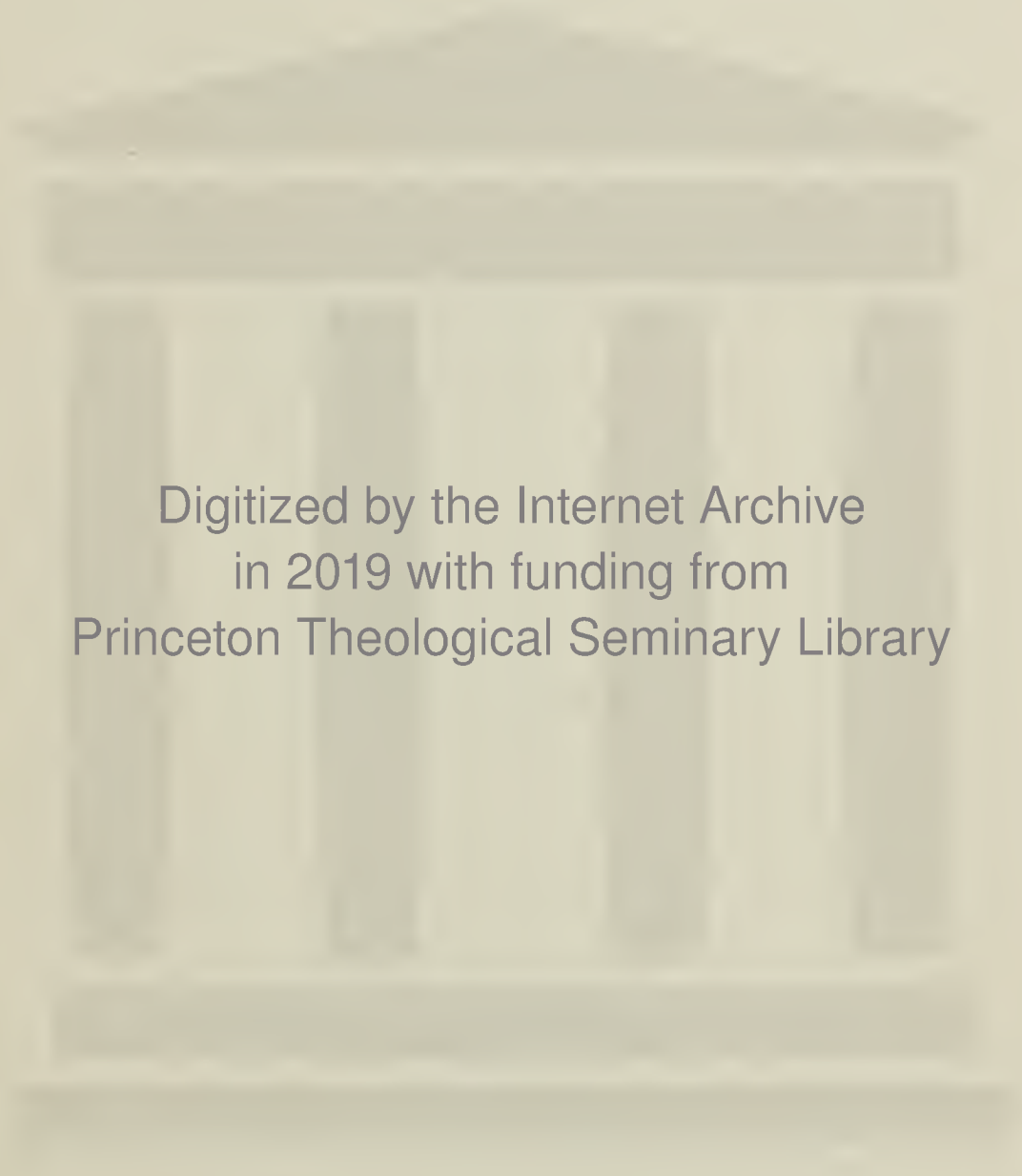
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Mary the Mother of Jesus

By
HOUSTON W. LOWRY

Libr. of religious thought.

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
H. W. L.

INTRODUCTION

THE mother of Jesus with the progress of zealous opinion has been put higher than her claims. From real womanhood she has been exalted to artificial godhead; and to trace the process is merely to observe the contact of Christianity with paganism. Converts trained to heathen worship were slow to quiet their craving for a feminine deity, and who else within the horizon of the Gospel could fill the terms as the elect woman of Nazareth? Upon the artless pages of the evangelist a glow of tradition and fancy was turned, and soon with the genius of chisel and brush the visible form was provided for the bended knee and sacred kiss of multitudes.

All to be known of Mary from the Scriptures is scant material to win her devotion to the extreme of worship or to ground for her the right of intercession. The trustworthy narrative gives her no independent prominence and introduces her merely as a link in the chain of Messianic purposes. She is mentioned only by the evangelists. She fails to appear altogether within the record of the epistles. John cherished her as his own mother, taking her into his personal care at the crucifixion of Christ; and yet, writing after the rest were gone and making up for their omissions, he did not include any note even of her death. Clearly in her own time Mary was regarded with but a neighborly interest and reverence.

Practically, it seems, pains were taken to guard the knowledge of her from abuse. Christ's own treatment of his mother is more than suggestive; it is conclusive. It is at least significant that any time Mary comes into the narrative later than the period of her son's infancy she merits and receives a kind of reproof at his hands. She chided him as a lad for lingering behind in Jerusalem instead of joining the caravan with the rest on the way home, and she heard him express surprise at her failure to associate him with his Father's house. And when she hinted for his supernatural help at the marriage feast in Cana, was she not given to understand that she had committed some impropriety? Greatest of all was her blunder with his mature and popular ministry. There was a rumor industriously spread that he had gone insane, and she appeared with the other members of her family to take him in charge. For once at least she lost faith, and she heard him say across the crowd that even mother and household could not with him displace disciples.

Mary's own confession is pertinent. There were mysteries in her life too profound for her to fathom. She could only retain them in her heart day by day and come ever more into their meaning. Appreciation at last inspired lofty praise, and as she entered the home of her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea she burst into song, combining aptly the tones of humility and elevation. There was full confidence with her, built upon unmistakable promise that she should bear a Holy

Son, but she knew equally that she would find in him her sufficient Savior. Was she not sinner with the mass of human kind?

Surely there is no occasion to disassociate Mary from the ranks of common womanhood. Any authoritative or rational encouragement is wanting. The mother of Jesus was not essentially superior to any other Mary. She is little disposed to claim worship or hear prayer. Mariolatry proceeds without Scriptural warrant, and honesty enters pronounced protest against the wicked abuse.

With the reaction from the Roman extreme there has been swing about as far the other way. The wrong of regarding Mary too highly has its counterpart in treating her to neglect. To give her more than her due is hardly worse than to ignore her altogether. Other characters in Scripture invite and receive close acquaintance, and why should the woman nearest by nature to Christ and his Gospel be left deliberately out of view? The women generally of the Bible are introduced and given value, and should the mother of Jesus be counted an exception and passed over in silence? There are other Marys in the Old Testament and the New to be afforded frequent and emphatic attention. Eve in the garden is not at all overlooked; and there are reviews in order of Sarah in the kitchen and Ruth in the harvest field and Esther on the throne and Dorcas with her charity and Lydia behind her counter or at prayer-meeting. Even Jezebel is often posed for strong but cruel picture, and for companion piece there is use of

Herodias, savage queen for later, persecution crisis. May it not be worth while equally, or more, to consult the facts about Mary the mother of Jesus, and use them to promote any appreciation of her rich character and function?

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MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Mary the Mother of Jesus

I

Mary and Gabriel

THE earliest mention of Mary is found in Luke. Attention is called to a village among the heights of Galilee, obscure at the time and disreputable as it was known, but unique evermore as Nazareth. And among its homes was one less marked, perhaps, than many others but proven an unmistakable center of innocence and comfort and joy. Whoever besides it sheltered, only a single member of the family has become known, a maiden with an inheritance to link her to the house of David but with a lot little to advertise her royalty. As was common with a people retaining the memory and song of Miriam her name was Mary. She had her birthright in the kingdom of God, and from childhood, witness to the precious covenant, she honored the practice of every devout Israelite and seized some interval with morning, noon or night to hold meditative and prayerful communion apart with God.

The reach and burden of her petitions are left only to imagination, but with easy understanding she is heard committing her ways to the covenant-making and covenant-keeping Jehovah, pleading the promises first made to the fathers in the distant centuries and reaffirmed to the intermediate gen-

erations, pleading that the Deliverer come and come quickly, Shiloh of patriarchal prophecy, that the Star out of Jacob arise without delay, that the rod out of the stem of Jesse spring up speedily, pleading that the nation be washed in the Fountain to be opened in Israel for all sin and uncleanness, pleading most that whatever her appointment with the glorious day of the Lord, whatever the strain of toil or blood of sacrifice, she be found faithful. If only the rule of the Messiah would begin and work its sure and splendid transformation on earth, what sword would she not consent to have pierce her very heart? The maiden alone in her chamber was offering her life without reserve to God.

And suddenly to her surprised or eager sense there was the approach, the appearance, of an angel from heaven. Gabriel hovered within her room, Gabriel of superior worth to stand before God or speed on urgent errands to man or maiden, sent to Daniel long before or of late to Zacharias at the temple altar, the Gabriel under appointment to sound a mighty trumpet at the last and call the dead to life and the universe to judgment, active throughout with the most tremendous crises of God's rule between the beginning and the end; and Gabriel was come to Mary in the secret place of prayer.

His salutation was startling. It began with the familiar oriental form, "Hail"! but it passed at once to strange announcement: "Thou art highly favored: the Lord is with thee". "Highly favored"! How? What rare allotment was Mary's

portion? It was surprising enough that some dazzling creature should invade the privacy of her inner apartment, but her sense was seized, not with his heavenly appearance, but with his mysterious message. There was the glad tone of the greeting, but within lurked strange meaning; and Mary, listening, questioning, within her own mind, with all the major key catching an undertone of minor, at least tense with the concern of weighty commission, was sore troubled.

In her perplexity, wondering for her part, she could only wait and give attention. The angel was not done. He had but prepared the way for his vital word. He was bent on pointed purpose, and he would surely make it known. It was not for Mary to speak. Was her heart stilled with the strain of suspense? And as she heard at length, she was given fond assurance: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God". Was it not enough to have her name voiced with the tones of heaven and to learn that she had won the gracious favor of God? Could there be any better boon? All the more she was ready for instant, hardy, sacrificial service.

The pause, if any, was brief. Mary was not left long to dwell with her thoughts; and as she was in any way perplexed she was given added, distinct word, definitely designed to dissolve every doubt. The angel message was at last delivered; "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a Son and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and he shall be called the Son

of the most High, and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of David forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end".

The announcement was amazing: of a son! a son to receive a matchless name and to justify it with a matchless character and mission! not the son of a woman only, but equally the Son of God! heir to Israel's throne but ruler of more, even of the whole earth! The dream of Messiah, promised with Adam and promised again with every supreme master and crisis of human history, was about to be realized. And Mary was to give him birth! Gabriel told the maiden, and he was sent from God!

How could these things be? Mary wondered. She did not doubt God's intention and her own mission, but she sought some explanation. With her pure life, with her clear conscience, she was confronted with a mystery. Was she anything but a virgin? And she was to bring forth a son! "How shall this be"? And she learned. The angel told her, using language marvellously delicate but unmistakably distinct: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God."

The message is plain assurance of supernatural intervention to bring about the motherhood of Mary. There was to be a new, original creation. As at the beginning the Spirit of God moved upon

the face of the waters and brought dark, barren earth into light and life, so he brooded again, interrupting the series of natural generations, and provided once more the quality of spotless innocence and genuine worth. There is no mistaking the authoritative announcement. The first man was a failure, an offence, but there was to be a second, and more than the early Adam Jesus was to be manifest the Son of God.

To fortify Mary in her faith and function Gabriel added a sign: "Behold, Elizabeth thy kinswoman, she also hath conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren. For no word from God shall be void of power". And Mary was assured. She had been appointed an intimate part in the provision of the Gospel, and she was ready for any associated duty or trial. There was only her voiced consent to serve, waiting for the angel interest, and it was given without delay or reserve: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word".

It is common to take Mary's mood for exaltation, and none could deny her the sense of joy with appointment to serve as the mother of the Messiah, but it would be mistaken to suppose that her cup was all sweet, that she caught no glimpse of a cross. She had not the gift of foresight, and sharing the current notions of the kingdom at hand, she could have pictured to her mind nothing of the sore processes of salvation, but she could only have felt something of the difficulty and embarrassment in-

evitable to her immediate part.

Could she disarm her prying neighbors of suspicion and avoid their cruel thrusts? How could she escape the sneers and jibes of the older women assigned with prevalent custom to watch her during the period of her betrothal? And, most of all, there was treatment to await her at the hands of Joseph. She would be struck with silence, controlled by her maiden mood, or if she could find speech, how could she justify her way and God's to the devout Israelite and even encourage their marriage? And to surprise and grieve his tender heart! She could keep her own conscience clear, but how could she assure others of her innocence and spare them pain? The cup put to her lips was any thing but sweet throughout. Mary proved the length and breadth and height and depth of self-renunciation. There was no easy path for her to follow. She was bound to find it narrow and rough and steep, but she did not shrink from the way. It was marked out for her feet by the finger of God, and she would trace it to the glad or grievous end. Her consent to service or sacrifice as the will of Heaven touched no horizon. It was born of the spirit of utmost martyrdom. Her sensitive nature might move her to shrink, but her devotion to duty prompted her with quiet yet determined tone to say from her heart: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word".

Mary was the last to claim worship from any people. She but counted her rank among the

lowly. Yet who else of all women was better chosen mother of the Messiah? By nature and culture she was thoroughly fitted to express the virtues of her kind. The superior origin of the world's Savior did not exempt him from the propriety and even necessity of most favorable earthly, human advantages. It was only wise and urgent that his home should be freest from rude or harmful possibilities, that the very atmosphere he breathed on the way to his Gospel ministry should be saturated with saintliness and prayer, that the bosom to nestle his brow should be spotless, and the hand to guide and sustain his early steps should be both strong and gentle with the grace of God. And surely with the glimpse afforded of the scene, presenting a maiden in her private room and showing her in prolonged meditation and prayer and marking her surrender to all holy and happy and even bitter uses of Heaven, discovery is made of one well qualified to be the mother of the Lord's Annointed.

And Mary was left alone again. Gabriel was gone, his errand to the young woman accomplished. And she had accepted her part, whether more of final distinction or present wonder and pain—who could tell? One thing is sure: if there had been occasion or relish for communion with God before, it must have taken much wider bounds with the marvellous word and appointment from God. The chamber she was quick to enter she was slow to leave, and she is observed to linger long, pondering the appearance and message of the angel and seeking grace to be humble with her lofty mission and to

be faithful with all the tax laid on her strength and courage.

The hope of the race still centers largely under God upon maiden, mother, and appointments to be Mary's in turn fall to women generally. The innocence, the faith, the self-surrender, marking the Hebrew girl in her chamber before God and his angel, are rightfully universal feminine traits. Heaven's assignments ever wait on fit subjects. And men are not indifferent observers. They have a preference for godly women, and they count any worthy specimen a sort of substitute angel. Crises of duty or privilege await all heedless of sex. How better meet them than with the spirit of Mary, the mother of Jesus? saying: "Behold the servant of the Lord: be it unto me according to thy word".

II

Mary and Elizabeth

THE interest of a sign prompted Mary to journey to the south. She learned from the angel that another miraculous birth was preparing with a kinswoman, and she would see and consult the aged Elizabeth. It has been suggested that ere she started she confided in Joseph, her betrothed husband, telling him of Gabriel's visit and message and of her mission to the hill country of Judea, telling him as was his possible right to know, but the understanding is entirely foreign to the narrative. Was there none in her own family to entrust with the holy secret? Was she motherless, orphaned? Was there no neighbor intimate, sympathetic, enough to share with and to return counsel with comfort or congratulation? But for the crisis of her fear or hope there was none to take the part with her of Elizabeth. The family tie was easy union, but it was truer, stronger and finer for a mutual mystery. Elizabeth was uninformed, but Mary knew, and she took the sign as sufficient appointment for a conference.

She lingered in Nazareth only to make ready for the journey. It is said that she went with haste, but it is meant, not that she hurried by the way, but that she lost no time with the start. Her point of arrival is uncertain. The indication is indefinite. The home she sought was somewhere

within the range or circle of Judean hills, and her itinerary is not detailed. It was doubtless a walk, taking at least four days, and surely she was furnished companionship as she journeyed, at least a caravan of pilgrims to Jerusalem.

But Mary with her secret must have walked wrapped in her mood alone. She could not share with any previous, common acquaintances. She could have no heart to indulge the pleasantries of gay and noisy throngs. Her wonted bent was meditation, and there was no lack of fund to feed her thoughts. Salvation was preparing for Israel and for the world, and she was to prove a personal link in the chain of royal events! A very burden of mingled desire and dread weighed her down, and she would find relief only in absorbing communion with her Heavenly Father.

Surely she paused at the temple in Jerusalem and received grace at the altar of Jehovah; and she could not fail to observe scenes already hallowed with the life of the nation or memorable more with prophecies of Messianic ministries to come. May she not have marked the village of Bethany as she climbed from the Jordan valley and threaded the eastern slope of Olivet, passing the home afterwards to provide shelter for the wearied and persecuted Nazarene? May she not have lingered at sunset to kneel in the quiet of Gethsemane and drink any cup of agony waiting for her lips? or receive any help for her hour and turn to her task with new courage and cheer? Southward with the morning she may have sighted Golgotha with

its ghastly seed of skulls, centering darkest tragedy yet to come. Any thing lost upon Mary or suggested to her informed and imaginative nature can not be confidently attested. At least her errand drew her on, Hebron in the distance, perhaps, wooing her steps, but the clear record is renewed at her meeting with Elizabeth.

There had been no recent communication between the women. Till the angel told her, Mary knew nothing of the miracle already wrought in the southern home, and even with her message she was not given to understand that the two sons to be born were to be joined as herald and king. In her mind the birth to Elizabeth was but supernatural assurance that the promise of her own high mission would hold good. Her errand to the hill country was more than any thing else to learn the truth about her cousin. There was a sign given her, and she would receive its full benefit.

She lost no time in setting out from Nazareth, and she lingered least along the way. Did she hesitate at the last? Did she pause at the threshold of the house among the hills? listening, wondering, fearing that she had been made the victim of some dream, yet hoping that she would find promised reality? Surely her faith was not to be discredited, and she was but eager and quick to certify the sign. She had hurried with her start, and she would scarcely delay long at the finish.

The meeting of the women was dramatic. There was no witness to check the current of their emotion or speech. Zacharias had been stricken deaf

and dumb for his early unbelief and was apparently gone into temporary retirement, shunning all observation; and Mary, entering without knock or call, came directly upon Elizabeth. She knew at once. The angel assurance was confirmed.

The interest of her discovery was intense and even painful, and with the destiny of the nation and of all the world suspended upon her immediate understanding, how could the emotional nature of the woman but be stirred to its very depths? And yet she did not part from her distinctive reserve. Instead of any tedious and extravagant demonstration she offered at once only the brief, sober word of oriental salutation.

Elizabeth promptly came into the action. She was taken unawares. She has received no word of Mary's visit nor appointment to lofty uses, but when she saw and heard her kinswoman she was at no loss. Intuition and sensation seized her and inspired her witness. There was really revelation with her as clear prompting. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, pronouncing benediction upon Mary and offering proof of Gospel benefit. Her own lot was to bear a son as forerunner of the Messiah, and it was worthy, but she knew nothing more. She was to serve a subordinate part, but she had been left only to wonder for her superior. Had she thought of Mary? At least she knew now. Her recognition of the woman assigned to the majestic function was instant and complete.

Did ever two other women with such holy, mighty interests in their keeping come face to face? Mary

and Elizabeth! Upon them at their meeting in the hill country of Judea centered the preparation and the kingdom. From the first there had been promise of the Seed of a woman to bruise the serpent's head, and the patience of the centuries was at last about to be honored. It was the day foreseen of Abraham to make him glad. The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God was coming close to express realization, and the priceless treasure was being stored for the time under the single roof with Mary and Elizabeth.

With her benediction upon the younger woman the older confessed personal inferiority in the rank of heavenly appointments. She felt unworthy to receive the mother of her Lord, and with her witness she was but exalting Mary. Nor was it recognition of the maiden merely as God's chosen to bear the Savior of the world. Credit was due most that in spite of the mountain difficulties in realizing the angel announcement she rested absolutely in the word and power of God. Zacharias with long years of gracious experience, a priest to take his turn at the temple altar, had doubted the promise of some hard thing, and Mary in view of something in her case vastly harder was equal to prompt and thorough faith. Who will not swell the single voice of praise, addressing the handmaid of the Lord, and make it mighty chorus as of innumerable angels?

With the silence to follow Elizabeth's rhapsody Mary broke into song. Expression with her had been restrained long enough. The angel's word

had been treated to some long interval of meditation and prayer and to her sensitive nature had furnished its meaning more and more. Apprehension grew into inspiration, and she swept away any barrier of reserve. She had seen and heard Elizabeth, and she could not be mistaken. God was greater than her heart, and she would acknowledge his favor. As waters from the hills gather behind any obstruction and then break into cataract and whirlpool, the full wealth of Mary's nature, the accumulation of all her years and specially of her recent and lofty days, was poured out as a very flood of praise.

The song, for one main feature, is intensely personal. Mary clearly appreciated her particular part in the program of the Gospel. As a mere, lowly maiden of Nazareth she was doomed to perpetual obscurity, but she was led to see a path pointing out the way for her feet and conducting her to dizzy heights. By the unmerited favor of God she was chosen for distinction in the sight of all nations. It was reason enough for doxology. Her soul was moved to magnify the Lord, and her spirit to rejoice in God her Savior.

The song was none the less Jewish. Mary was still standing on Old Testament ground. The Sun of righteousness with healing on his wings was yet below the eastern horizon. Both women gave expression higher than they knew. With their utterances they allowed for deepening appreciation along the Gospel ages. On the surface they really joined fit numbers to the Hebrew

Psalter. They expressed the contents of current Messianic hopes. They sounded trumpets with note of victory. They heralded the kingdom of David.

Material is furnished for anthems. Any sound of a dirge with sigh or sob is excluded. Where is there hint on the page of a cross? Does not the sense announce the singers? They belong to their own people and to their own time. They are still possessed of their traditional notions and interpretations, and they will be relieved and improved only with tardy, painful processes. Even the apostles were slow to surrender their mistaken understandings. And was it to be expected that any two women should succeed in escaping prejudice? Could their inheritance and training do less than color their expression?

But the song of Mary was extensive. It took in the whole world. It entertained the human element as really as the national. It mentioned all generations, and while it made note of time with the word it really recognized the race. Abraham's seed was nothing tribal. It became as universal as believers. There were the literal descendants of the patriarch, but the promise of the Covenant was eminently to his children in the faith, and as they are all counted they are more in number than the stars of heaven or the sands upon the seashore. And Mary's song surveyed the multitude.

It rose at last to worship. The personal interest, the national and the universal were caught

into a single strain and born upward as the celebration of God's might and mercy, of his justice and help. There is the swell of inspired praise. The humble Jewish maid is transformed or obliterated; Nazareth is remote or forgotten, and only some stately Miriam is heard, voicing anthem on the shore of the sea and using the sound waves at her feet for organ accompaniment.

A single insertion is made, closing the page of song and telling that Mary abode with Elizabeth about three months and then returned to Nazareth. The interval surely was packed with sacred, precious concerns. To prompt the meeting at the first, certainly, was the encouragement of faith, but there was attached many a minor intention. Surely Mary with her inexperience and with her mission craved human, appreciative, sympathetic companionship and found her satisfaction with a woman of age and wisdom and piety and tenderness, a woman to be trusted without limit and offer motherly bosom for holy, happy, careful secrets, mingling alarm and exultation, bewilderment and joy, shrinking and hope; and, it may be, Elizabeth needed Mary, too. It was not all bright and easy for the older woman. Her reproach was taken away, but her cup was not sweet throughout. All motherhood is some approach to martyrdom; and would not fellowship with young, glad life be to the heart of Elizabeth as to her brow some fresh, cool breeze from the heights?

There was no tedium with the time. To occupy the period was quiet, genial, comforting or inspir-

ing talk. Would not Elizabeth repeat the story of the angel's appearance and message to Zacharias at the altar, dwelling upon their distinct features and interpreting their sense? And would not Mary recount the visit of the same bright creature, welcomed in her room at Nazareth, and reproduce the scene permanently graven with fond touch upon her memory? And if ever the faith and hope of the women dulled, and in the light of daily, humble interests they wondered how these things could be, they had only to turn and see the old priest sitting apart, silent, speechless, and know that any marvellous word from God would hold good.

And communion in prayer was observed, prayer for grace to be strong and eager for the appointments of God, for any burden laid upon their lives, to be humble as they were caught up to the third heaven of privilege or to keep true wing in their flight. And sing? What Hebrew is wanting in the gift and use of song? With the two there surely was the impulse. The psalms of David were their rich inheritance, and fit expression waited on frequent line to fit their faith or foreboding.

The truth about the Messiah and his herald would not occur to them in its entirety, but it was certainly offered them with large dimension and given room. As the Gospel in anticipation at all appealed to them, it would encourage an interchange of thoughts, and in the glow of prayer and converse its meanings would enlarge upon their ap-

preciation. Was it not enough with them to forecast their experience and with the light in the east frame something of the two lives bound up mysteriously with their own?

Blessed converse of good women! What if their plans and prayers and hopes were allowed full realization in the world? Would not earth be brought nearer heaven? To disappoint them is outright proof of total depravity. They are entitled to help with their Gospel program. Surely the impression is worth while of the scene in the village home, of Elizabeth with her ripe saintliness and at her feet the girlish Mary known as the handmaid of the Lord and chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

III

Mary and Joseph

MARY with the angel announcement had hurried to Elizabeth, but she scarcely could have been as swift to return home. Under the roof of the chastened priest and his wife, as nowhere else, her glad yet serious secret was understood, and her innocence and high calling recognized. With her intimate friends she was furnished a house of refuge and was given full encouragement for her part. To leave her saintly, appreciative cousin and return to Nazareth was to forsake some warm, cheerful fireside and enter the atmosphere of a cold, dark, uncertain night. Her stay in the south was evidently about three months, and she journeyed north only a little before the birth of John.

What could she but expect at home? Was there any thing for her but a gloomy prospect? The treatment she could only anticipate was bound to be tinged with the hue of dread. She might protest her innocence and rehearse the story of the angel's visit and message, but for comment she could count on nothing free from shrugs and sneers. She would be strictly shunned by her previous friends. Would her own family regard her without suspicion? Would the door be shut in her face and barred tight? Or as she would be allowed to enter, could she find approval and comfort anywhere but in her angel-haunted room?

The darkest prospect must have centered upon Joseph. The time for her promised marriage with him was about come, and she had nourished all the joy incident to the approaching day. Was she not maiden enough to entwine festal wreaths for her bridal? And was she to lay them aside after all? Were they to be torn from her eager brow? Were they to be mere memorials of her disappointment and shame? Were they to serve as sad tokens for a kind of funeral?

How could her simple word stand against the unavoidable doubts of her betrothed? She would tell him of Gabriel's appearance and announcement in her chamber, of the interest laid upon her life as the direct appointment of God; of the miraculous interposition to effect her motherhood; but would she be able to win his confidence? She might humble her posture in his presence; would she be raised to his side or spurned from his feet? She knew him for a righteous man, and she could count on him for no compromise with real or imagined wrong. She was sure that his affection would not be permitted to sway his conscience. What if she could not retain even his respect? His disappointment with her would prove harshest experience of all. Separation would be bad enough, but alienation would be far worse.

Only Mary's marvelous faith could have proved sufficient for her in the crisis with Joseph, faith to assure her that the same hand of God to lay the burden would hold her up, that the ministering angel would serve anew and prepare the heart of

her betrothed alike with her own. Surely she would be given to see her way step by step, and through any dark valley or over any ragged rocks she would be brought into light and peace. Dread with the immediate prospect and hope beyond were intermingled on her map, and as with clouds under a fair sky of June they marked the landscape with alternate sunshine and shadow.

What pauses Mary put in on her way home, delaying disagreeable developments, or what readiness to be over with the worst escapes all written mention. Even her arrival is treated to scant notice. Her family and mere acquaintances are overlooked entirely, and concern is confined strictly to her experience at the hands of Joseph. Who else was vitally connected with the sacred interest?

The period of betrothal was come to a close. It was time for the marriage. Mary, it is safe to suppose, had from the first been silent. Reticence was her distinctive trait, and certainly with any sacred, delicate subject involved it kept thorough rule of her speech. For any disclosure she could but await God's time and method. Faith with her was expressed with the quality of reserve, and before the marriage she was simply found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Events had been allowed to take their independent course, but at last there was personal action. There was the discovery alike embarrassing, painful, to Mary and Joseph. Charge of wrong or protest of innocence was neither given nor taken. But things could not go on as planned.

Sentiment could not displace rectitude. Joseph was profoundly religious, and with him devotion to Mary could not supplant regard for God. But if the law must have its way with him, he would make sure of giving it mildest interpretation.

Betrothal with the Hebrews was something strict. Even before they came together Joseph in the Gospel record was spoken of as husband, and Mary as wife. The Levitical law made no essential distinction between marital promise and realization, providing the same judgment for infidelity before as after. And Mary as only the espoused wife of Joseph, found with child, was liable to the extreme penalty of death by stoning.

But there was different course of procedure offered as alternative, a method more humane. It came into later practice with the Jews and corresponded to something like modern divorce. The man could appear before a magistrate, put in accusation, supporting it with competent witnesses, and count on release from any marriage covenant. But Joseph did not have the heart to proceed openly against Mary. He was unwilling to make her a public example. Instead, he undertook to give her a writ of divorcement and screen her from all official or general exposure. He was minded to put her away privily, effecting a kind of legal separation.

Was Mary consulted? Was her consent secured? Surely she was at least submissive. Silence was still her nature and policy. Clearly she offered no defence. Who would believe her

story of an angel and his message? None but Elizabeth and Zacharias, subjects for like visitation. And Joseph went on with his brooding, balancing his conscience with mercy for Mary and at last reaching firm conclusion. Marriage was impossible. There could only be quiet separation.

All left to Joseph was to take the step. The interval between his discovery and his decision, or between his decision and the date for final action, covered many an hour of disquietude, of worry, each to pass into long, wakeful night. How could he sleep with an uncertain or painful duty pressing upon his heart? He could only toss from side to side or stare into the darkness in his search for the right and best way to follow, but with conviction or conclusion at last he could realize the rest of a stable mind. The victory was won at midnight, it may be; and following the tumult there came the hush of sleep.

But it was not all sleep. Sleep proved avenue to a dream. Joseph was not left to his own doubtful device. He was kept from any wrong. The resolution he had reached to put away Mary was reversed. An angel of the Lord was sent with pointed instructions. Any name is omitted, but who was active throughout the epoch unless Gabriel? After his service for Zacharias and Mary would he not visit Joseph to complete the circle of heavenly appointments?

With his message he told the truth concerning Mary and claimed protection for her in marriage. The word assured her innocence and explained her

motherhood, telling the sufficient power of the Holy Spirit in her case. It quoted prophecy and asserted fulfillment, all associating the Messiah unmistakably and announcing Gospel salvation; and it encouraged Joseph without fear to take Mary to wife.

Did Joseph merit and receive reproof? If ever he had entertained doubt of Mary in his mind, did he feel no sting of remorse to vex his waking thoughts? He had at least been kept back from appalling precipice. He had been about to cast off as unfaithful the very mother of the Messiah! Remonstrance to escape his suspicion she had offered none. At least in her silence he ought to have discovered proof of her spotless innocence. With any guilt, he might have known, she would have put in loud defence. Surely he was thankful for the angel's word. It set him right. It stayed him from rank injustice to Mary and prompted him to instant, urgent action. He arose the morning after his dream and made shelter for her as his lawful, wedded wife before the world.

Joseph is entitled to some attention on his own personal merit. Mary for the time was passive, and to her betrothed or married husband fell the part of initiative action. Even with smallest implement of measure his service in the Gospel shows massive. He was a good man, well qualified for his mission whether as husband of Mary or reputed and practical father of the Messiah. He was in a hard position, but he behaved with tact and strength and dignity. He was inseparable from

the incidents reported of the family, and he earned approval throughout.

It was beautifully considerate of him not to leave Mary without protection from prying or persecuting neighbors but to take her along with his unavoidable journey to Bethlehem. And he was close with the birth of the child. The shepherds, coming from their watch in the open night and thrilling with the sight and song and witness of the angel host, found Mary and Joseph and the babe, all one intimate group. The three were together at the presentation in the temple. And the man marvelled with the mother at the things said by Simeon of the child and received with the family the benediction of the hoary saint. He was thoroughly heedful of every angel-borne word. He moved promptly at the warning of danger for the safety of his precious charge; for escape from the jealous, cruel hand of Herod found refuge in Egypt, and as the way was again clear built anew the home in Nazareth, turning aside from residence in insecure Bethlehem. And did he not share the anxiety and search for the lost boy of twelve at the Passover?

Later there is nothing more definite than hints. It appears that Joseph and Jesus through all their mature association were sympathetic and co-operative. They shared with each other the interests of family life and support. They worked at the same bench, on the same job, and handled the same tools. And surely there were intervals of pause. The craftsman, teaching the apprentice, illustrating,

directing, and both learning lessons worthier than any skill with steel or wood, claimed and found an intimacy true and fine and sweet with the quality of heaven. Life developed, and there came recognition of the carpenter's son and, at last, of the mature and independent carpenter.

Joseph drops out of view early. There is no mention of him as alive with the acts of Jesus before the world. Instead, is the appeal of Mary as a widow, alone of her family at the cross and committed to the care of John. Tradition and art make her younger far than her husband. The discovery of other children in the household has started the opinion that they were children of Joseph by a former marriage, but facts are not turned with the sway of mere prejudice. Nothing is known conclusively of Joseph's age, nor is there good reason to understand that he made Mary his second wife. The comprehensive items are spread upon the Gospel page, and they require little supplement. It is enough really that they credit the man as worthy both of Mary and of her exceptional son.

Mary was given greater appointment in the Gospel provision, God choosing her out of all womanhood to be the mother of the Messiah; yet it is not to be overlooked that but for Joseph to smooth her path and ease her burden the mission to which she was called would have proved vastly more difficult and disagreeable whether in her own separate lot or in her nurture of God's unspeakable gift to the world. To her he was as a refuge from

the storm, a shadow from the heat, a tower of strength, and with all the majestic, hallowed memorial raised in her honor letters to carry his name, reduced or indistinct as they may be, should be inscribed with hers.

The marriage of Mary and Joseph departed plainly from Hebrew custom. It was different, no doubt, from their original plans. It was little announced, and it was scarcely noticed outside the village, if at all within. There was no pomp of ceremony, no elaborate decoration, no long nor lavish festival. Some of the usual formalities were altogether omitted. With least required or optional observance Joseph simply took Mary unto him as his wife. The man sheltered the women with his home and proved it the gate of heaven.

IV

Mary and Jesus

JESUS of Nazareth is incomparable. Once he appears, all other characters with honest sight lose something of their interest and value. It is easy enough to make Mary central to the scenes that introduce her only with Gabriel or Elizabeth or Joseph, but as Christ is born and started upon his public ministry his mother is treated to small notice in the Gospel narrative; and the literary problem develops of putting her into prominence in place of her supreme son. How may a planet like Mercury be viewed within the blaze of solar light?

But Mary is not to be overlooked, and after any survey of previous events, her appointment by the angel, her communion with Elizabeth and her marriage to Joseph, the way is clear at last to pause with occurrences connecting her distinctively with Jesus.

Attention fastens at once upon the nativity and deals with the introductory item of location. The family home was in Nazareth, but Christ was born in Bethlehem. Providence was presiding to determine all the linked events. The Messiah was to be known as the Son of David, and it was appropriate alike to pedigree and prophecy that his birth should take place within the region forever associated with the name and shepherd life of his

remote and royal ancestor.

The arrangement was effected by an imperial decree. It was the will of Augustus Ceasar that all the Roman world should be taxed, and the order took every citizen in Palestine to his original residence for enrolment. Joseph belonged to Bethlehem, and as his name was inscribed on the registers of the southern village he had to make the journey for recognition and census. But only the head of each household was required to put in appearance, answering the royal summons, and yet Joseph took Mary along. Is not the discovery proof of his fine thoughtfulness? He would not leave her behind to encounter possible persecutions alone, and he would secure her the comfort of his constant companionship and share with her for any approaching crisis in her experience.

The journey is left without description, but speedy developments at the close were given some detailed account. The caravansary where Joseph and Mary claimed lodging was found full. There was no room for them at least in the surrounding compartments, and the woman in her pangs could only lie down in the open area and find relief with the birth of her child and for want of other fit hands with her own wrap him in swaddling clothes and lay him in some convenient stable trough or manger.

The circumstances appeal with the force of utmost pathos, but there is welcome contrast with the discovery of inward values. Walls wide enough for a palace and gorgeous with painting or

crystal or tapestry and supplied with richest upholstery, all at their best, would have proved dull, meager setting for the Eternal Word of God made flesh. Any human birth is occasion sufficient to excite unbounded wonder. The mystery of life from heavenly sources to earthly issues attaches thrilling amazement, proving that a child is born into the world, but when God becomes incarnate, when the only begotten, well beloved Son in the divine Trinity was revealed as the son of Mary, surely it was enough to bring angels from the skies for witnesses or wise men from the distant, storied east.

The Desire of all nations was at last come. The heavenly origin, the earthly appointment, the humble lot, the harsh privation, the cruel toil, the final sacrifice and the resurrection beyond, all as incidents of Christ's errand to the world, were bound up at least tentatively in the tiny form bundled and cradled in the corral of Bethlehem. Glory was vested in life, and it was superior to circumstances. Perhaps unadorned nature after all was fittest setting for the birth of Christ. There was the interest of worthy creatures from lowly cattle to exalted stars, and it was best.

Mary's part became at once subordinate. The child was put to displace the mother. Her treatment by the evangelists was no longer descriptive. It was more suggestive. The angel of the Lord, appearing and speaking to the shepherds in their lonely night watch, announced not the motherhood of Mary, but the birth of Christ, and the story

the witnesses gave out of what they had seen and heard was concerned strictly with the babe. The mother was only a watcher, a listener, in turn. She was silent in the midst of the scenes and sayings, and she was unobserved except for her ministries to the child, but she was far from impassive. Not a look was lost upon her attention, not a word did she fail to catch and keep. All was fund for her to cherish through the years, to pray over and ponder in her heart.

Surely there was lavish material for meditation. Marvels were happening in bewildering number and variety, and meanings with Mary took time for growth and clearness. The announcement she heard originally from the angel was the first great thing to land upon her life, but it was followed by a startling series. Only her faith had delivered her from the temptation to count her entire experience a hazy dream or, as it was real, to shun the path of duty. And every word had come out true! Was there not prompt confirmation with the birth of John in the hill country of Judea. And her own motherhood was final demonstration. The virgin had brought forth a son. He lay, an immediate, precious gift from God, on her bosom. What was to prove his character? she wondered, his calling? Could she forget her greeting from Elizabeth? And how could she forget the inspiration of her own song in return? And the shepherds! How strange it was that they should see visions and hear anthems of angels and move at once to follow the indications and seek her child

and worship at his feet! Was ever first-born before ushered into life with equal wonders? What fond fancies Mary was given material to weave upon the brow of her babe more than mothers generally are inspired to gather about the tiny creatures of their own flesh and blood!

The Mosaic observances were still in force. The veil hung thick between the double apartments of the temple in Jerusalem, and from altar and censor came the smoke and perfume of daily offerings. It was an ordered and splendid ritual, and Mary was little excused from its claims. The circumcision of the child on the eighth day was a private ceremony, leaving the mother in the background, but with the fortieth day she was brought into public and prominent action. She was required to observe the ritual of purification. During the long interval, as the law prescribed, she was unclean and was kept aloof from sacred associations. At the close of the period she was to appear at the temple, give thanks for her deliverance and offer sacrifice for her release from her ceremonial defilement; and it must have been with a glad heart that she took her place with a group of her kind at early morning to pay her vows and claim anew the loving recognition of God.

And she was ready with her sacrifice for cleansing. The law specified a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtle dove for a sin-offering, but in case of poverty birds of either kind were accepted, one for each interest. Was Mary poor, then, that she should fail to provide the richer

sacrifice? Perhaps; yet the inference is unnecessary. It is said that the sale of pigeons and doves at the time was in the hands of a monopoly, and purchase was possible only at an exorbitant price, an abuse to receive strong protest from Christ with his manhood's ministry.

But the purification of the mother was not the only interest at the temple. There was another with the presentation and redemption of the child. It was written that the firstborn in every household belonged exclusively to God and was to be set apart strictly, eminently, to holy service. The earlier saints were held honestly to the claim, but with Moses there was modification. The Levites were appointed substitutes, serving in sacred office for the rest. The substitution was really a purchase, the amount fixed at five shekels or about three dollars. There was the form of a ransom, and as its terms were met by Mary and Joseph it completed the ritual required with the birth of Jesus.

But interest centers not so much upon routine ceremonials as upon associated surprises. While the observances were in progress at the temple a man named Simeon hovered near and at last broke in with words and acts of recognition. He was worthy saint, specimen of true Israel, looking for the consolation and cherishing the inspiration of God, and it was his part with any others to bear witness to the messiahship of the infant Jesus. Had it not been revealed to him that ere he died he would see the Lord's Christ? It was a beautiful incident, and Mary must have looked in happy

surprise as the hoary Israelite took her babe in his arms and with expression of deepest joy over what his eyes were permitted to see prayed that he might now depart in peace.

But Simeon did not stop with himself or the child. He turned with recognition to Mary. Did he know of the angel's visit to her room and of her appointment to lofty uses? And did he not see in her babe the salvation or doom of Israel? What satisfaction it was to find her superior understanding certified! But there was more for her than joy. There was a note of discord or division or disaster centering upon her child, and with his agony her mother soul would feel the savage thrust as of a sword. Even in the early hour of her bright, happy mood there entered upon her quick nature the chill shadow of the cross.

After the ceremonies in Jerusalem Joseph and Mary with the babe returned to Bethlehem. Apparently they had decided to forsake Nazareth and seek permanent residence in the village associating their forefathers. Was it not appropriate to surround the child with the scenes hallowed by the experiences of the royal David and by the recent marvels with angels and shepherds? Sights and sounds would hold long among the hills as sacred, inspiring memories.

The return of the family, it is understood, was soon followed by the visit of the wise men from the east. They were added, eminent witnesses to the Gospel, but their part had little to do with Mary except to furnish her new material to ponder.

Perhaps, it provided for an immediate emergency. The treasure the magi offered as token of their homage might have been put to prompt and urgent use. The harsh device of Herod to dispose of any possible rival compelled hasty flight of the holy family to Egypt. Christ was little more than born till he was hounded for slaughter; and did not the sword enter at once the heart of his mother?

The stay in Egypt is treated only to slightest mention. For any details there is resort but to independent information. The journey took about a fortnight, and the exile lasted two or three months. Word of the death of the envious king prompted return to Palestine, and the intention was to renew life in Bethlehem, but fear of Herod's successor stood in the way. Surely there was an overruling providence. God was caring for his own. There was dream to direct the escape to Egypt, a second to propose the return to the land of promise, and a third pointed away from Bethlehem. There was a prophecy to be fulfilled. Christ was to be called a Nazarene, and back of it was wise policy. He was best brought up remote from centers of adverse influence and close to God—and mother.

More than ever earlier Mary must have pondered. What could the late flight for safety only mean? Was persecution to begin with her child at once? Was she required to shelter him from envious harm even as an infant? Was the persecution from Herod a foretaste of the treatment to last all through the coming years? How Mary must have known increasingly that she could not

keep her boy always apart! There was the touch of martyrdom resting upon his life from the first, and it would press harder all the time to the crushing end.

Infant days! what mother would not count them priceless and long to keep them indefinitely? She would perpetuate the piece of babyhood in her care. She is jealous of its growth. She pictures the toils and strifes awaiting the young thing with manhood and shrinks from the prospect, hugging him to her heart with the pressure of pain. She can not escape the conviction that his life out in the world will be tempest-tossed, that cups will be offered him to drink as some agony, that his way will grow rough and weary and will be ever stained with blood, and whatever other period along the way is so precious to her as when her child all innocent and sweet and happy nestles in her arms?

Was Christ a babe not to smile and leap with joy? There must have been tears; what infant cheek does not moisten, glisten, with their drop or flow, but there were not tears only. There was genuine babyhood with Christ, the surer, finer, for its spotless innocence and perfect health, and it was expressed with the glow of glad sunshine. And Mary's was a genuine motherhood—with all its tender and satisfied yearning, with all its gilded hope.

See the two, mother and child, in the shadow shaping a cross, but see them little conscious at least sometimes of its chill. Had Mary foreseen all the suffering in store for them, she could have

not survived the hour. The crushing reality grew upon her experience only as she was able to bear the burden. Motherhood may border upon martyrdom, but motherhood borders upon heaven, too, and Mary, pictured with her firstborn in her arms, is not more shaded with sorrow than brightened with bliss.

V

Mary and Jesus

(Continued)

THE life of Jesus was richly set in the supernatural. Heaven was brought close to earth. With every crisis there was the manifest ministry of angels. They were introduced with the morning of the resurrection, seated at the entrance to the open sepulchre or hovering within and charged with their glad story for weeping women or despairing apostles. More than twelve legions were ready to deliver the Savior from arrest in the garden, and help from the throng was observed at his side to sustain him in his previous agony. Following his fast and trial in the wilderness they served for his relief, and they were surely busy about his birth, ministering with message and song.

But with all the industry of angels for the care of Christ there was no release of Mary. The supernatural incidents associating her son really required her larger responsibility. The human nature of her child and the human conditions of his life appealed for a mother's ministry. He grew and waxed strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him; and the process of development implied the use of means. He must have been exceptionally free from infant ailments and disposed to innocence and service, but with

all the advantage incident to him as the Son of God his boyhood as the Son of man was little exempt from the need of protection and training to be found best at the hands of his mother.

Mary with Joseph to help her was specially fitted for her part. As a mother with the habit of true mothers in general she watched and prayed. There was a rare trust committed to her charge, and she heard the clear call to be faithful. Parenthood with her was no optional interest. It claimed her attention as unavoidable, urgent duty. Her child needed nurture, and all known of her announces her painstaking regard for his welfare.

A single fragment of history out of the long period between the early infancy of Jesus and his mature ministry is put upon the Gospel record, and it involved his mother intimately. He had become a lad of twelve years and had reached his religious majority. With his previous years he was left at home as the family journeyed to Jerusalem, but at last he was subject to the claims of the ceremonial law and required to appear at the national feasts with the rest.

It was no hardship, to be sure, for the halfgrown boy to join the pilgrimage or to visit the capital, and he was so fascinated with the sights and sounds of the city that he was not ready to return to Nazareth promptly with the expiration of the week or ten days and was missing at camp the first evening out along the way. Nobody was specially to blame. The start may not have been a common understanding, and Christ was absorbed in the

study of things at the capital and particularly appreciative of the advantages of the rabinnical schools. Any way he was a boy to be trusted, and Mary and Joseph took it for granted that he was somewhere in the caravan.

The discovery of his absence was at least disquieting, and it prompted them to immediate search. He was not among his kinsfolk or acquaintance, and they turned back to the city all anxiety. Mary's sleep with the night must have been broken and fitful. Was her attendance at the feast to close with tragedy? How could she shut her eyes? There was the pressure of foreboding on her heart. Dark prophecy, she knew, centered upon his life and hers, and was it at once to fall true? Had the cruel plot like the bloody scheme at his birth made him victim after all? Mary was troubled deeply, and Joseph was thoroughly sympathetic.

The search was tedious. The place alone was populous, and pilgrims from beyond waited about as a multitude. To look for a single lad in the vast throng was discouraging business, but sorrow as she must Mary would not faint nor quit. With Joseph she turned to the most likely places as she knew them, to the familiar lodginghouse and to the nooks and corners in the vicinity, and everywhere she listened. Could it be that no word of him awaited her anywhere?

Another wakeful night passed, its darkness mustering new terrors. The very stillness was clamorous with possible screams of fright or pain, and morning came with the relief of certain, prospective

issues of disappointment or satisfaction. It was the beginning of the third day, and the search was renewed. Could the boy be at the temple? What was more natural to him after all than the house of prayer? Was he not more interested in sacred things than in all else? Certainly the sanctuary was the place to look for him; and there sometime within the day he was found.

Mary and Joseph were astonished, and their surprise prompted speech. Of course, it was for the mother to give expression, and she indulged a measure of reproach. She chided the boy for some ill treatment of his parents, with his thoughtlessness at least occasioning them tearful concern. But she went too far, perhaps. At least her questioning got return in kind. Why should she look all other places and keep on to the third day? Why did she not come to the sanctuary direct? Did she not understand what was to attract him most? Ought she not to have known that he would be somewhere above the temple, preparing for his Father's appointments?

Clearly Christ was coming into consciousness of his heavenly nature and mission, and responsibility to his mother was beginning to occur with him as secondary. He was bordering upon personal independence, and he was treating Mary to a startling discovery. Mothers commonly are slow to observe dawning manhood with their boys. Symptoms of independence, promising or threatening maturity with young natures, are pretty sure to treat maternal sensibility to shocks; and Mary was victim along

with her class. The Savior was growing separate from the son, and the discovery of the development was something new and even painful for her to ponder in her heart.

A further incident with Christ, introducing his mother, belonged to the period of transition. He was passing from his private preparation and entering upon his public ministry; and there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee for him to attend with his disciples and his mother. Mary's part in the wedding feast, to be sure, indicates that she was on intimate terms with the family. She may have been a blood relative. At least she was a close acquaintance; and when the wine failed she was concerned for a new supply. It was evidently a humble household, ill prepared for surprise with any increase of guests, and sharing the embarrassment of any shortage of provision she turned to Christ for relief.

In some way she was assured that he might meet the emergency. She seemed to know that he was possessed of miraculous power, but she had not witnessed the least demonstration. She had observed no miracle wrought at his hands. But she may have seen the signs connected with his baptism under the ministry of John or, certainly, known of them from his disciples. Any way she had not observed him all the years nor treasured his sayings without making discoveries, and she knew him clearly for the Messiah. She shared with the Jews in general the earthly notions of his mission, and all the more she felt that her son was equal

to the local emergency, and she addressed him with a mere quiet word of information, telling him of the failure of the wine. Evidently she understood that for him but to know was appeal enough. What sounded like only a bit of gossip was really prayer—or a command.

And Jesus was at no loss to trace his mother's intention. Her look or tone or touch along with her announcement aside was sufficient, and he was ready with his response. Was Mary surprised as she heard? was she disappointed? hurt? Was she reproved? The impression is all but conveyed that she was told to keep her distance, yet she little took her treatment as a repulse. She appealed at once to the attendants to follow carefully any instruction from Christ. Evidently she was far from discouraged. She counted confidently on the miracle, and as results proved she had full reason.

But Mary did not escape some kind of criticism. Christ called her "Woman". To be sure, he did not design disrespect; in all the tenderness of his parting on the cross he called her woman, and he used the name commonly attaching only highest reverence, but in avoiding address as mother he at least disowned her authority. She was plainly trespassing upon his personal province. It was not her function to precipitate his messianic exercise. His hour rested with higher sources, and when it struck he would act. The manifestation of his power belonged to official sovereignty. Could it be that the opening of his era should occur in a retired village and with humblest folk for first

witnesses? The determination was left to him and his Father in heaven, and no one besides could interfere, not even his mother.

The understanding was confirmed later. It came with the popular development of Christ's work. He was in the midst of his Gospel enterprise with teaching and healing, but along with any mass of superficial believers he had drawn extensive and determined opposition. With all the rumor was spread, perhaps industriously, that he was gone insane, and it was borne to his family, and it hurried them to reach him and take him in charge. His brothers were specially moved, concerned that no harm threatening him should involve them, but his mother came along. Her interest, no doubt, was his safety, but with her faith in him, with her appreciation of his origin and mission, why did she not applaud his heroic stand and trust him to accomplish his worthy intention?

Surely she might have spared her son the pain of misjudgment, and in disappointing him she merited and received at least implied, severe censure. She with the others could not get close to Christ for the crowd and could but pass him word that she and his brethren were waiting out at the edge and wanting to speak to him. With superior discernment he understood their errand, and he returned prompt, startling treatment. Did he disown his kin? his mother with the rest? At least he recognized and announced loftier claims and, pointing to his disciples within reach, insisted that they took higher, more intimate place with him than

his immediate family. Spiritual relations, as he knew them, were more vital, enduring, precious, than any others. And Mary, listening, learning, could have but felt the shame and grief of misinterpreting her Savior and discrediting her son. And Christ! Christ was not renouncing his mother. He was only asserting himself.

The shadows about Mary were deepening. Hope in her heart may have been long alternate with dread, but there was no avoiding the worst at the last. It was her lot to witness the sacrifice of her son, and Calvary may not be lost to view even over the space of multiplying centuries. It is really as immediate, as distinct, as any neighbor's dooryard. Human faith any time regards the cross personal. There is the impression of darkest tragedy, and it is universal as the Gospel. Hallowed imagination reproduces the scene and dwells upon its plain particulars.

The form of the Nazarene was stretched upon the beams and fastened with nails, then was raised aloft and allowed to fall into its place with a straining, tearing, sickening jolt; and there was the pallor, then flush, of his face, the clutch of his fingers, the gasp of his breath. And broken cries are heard, and anguished groans and smothered prayers, with the darkness and its long interval of aching calm, and there was the end, sooner than expected, with the ruptured heart of Christ.

And sometime within the scene Mary was a witness, waiting with the other women below the cross. She may not have been present at the first,

and she may not have lingered till the last, but she clearly hovered close for a while; and Christ in his own agony was not forgetful of his mother's. The cross is comprehensive. And any who follow Christ are confronted sooner or later with a kind of Calvary. Sacrifice is the law of every worthy life, and God makes sure that it is furnished ample occasion.

But for Mary there was special community with Christ. His crucifixion she took to heart as his mother, and as he observed her in the group below he became concerned to spare her pain. Why should she remain to endure the sight of his torture to the end? And there was the beloved disciple John, her sister's son, Christ's own cousin, to take her in tender charge. There was a word from the cross, committing the two to each other as mother and son or son and mother and apparently suggesting that they withdraw together from the harrowing scene. And John took Mary away.

But Christ was concerned for more than release of Mary from immediate suffering. He was also making provision for her future comfort. There were other children in the family, all mature, but they were skeptical of Christ's superior claims and even averse to his Gospel mission, and as a consequence they were out of sympathy with his mother. Later, surrendering to the plea of his crucifixion or, more, to the witness of his resurrection, they accepted him as their Savior as well as their brother, but as they were still aloof at the hour of his death he was thoughtful of Mary and provided

her a permanent, genial home with John. The self-renunciation that was her marked trait with the message of the angel, telling her that she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah and with all the majesty of her part leaving her to catch some glimpse of the inestimable cost, was eminent with her Son. Stricken himself, verging upon final, complete desolation, he yet found room to shield Mary from sorrow and to secure her possible peace for the remnant of her days.

Mary was no real exception to common womankind. She knew her own personal limitation and claimed no special recognition from the world. At the very first she voiced thankful dependence upon God her Savior. And the child she reared was her Redeemer as he was provisionally for the rest of human kind. She was favored above women in general, but she far from merited the praise of innocence. Like any other daughter of Eve she was subject for the pardoning, quickening, heaven-bringing grace of God. She followed her Son along with any Mary of Magdala; and by rough, steep, narrow way found her salvation. The mistaken notions and ambitions she had cherished at the first were uprooted from her nature by keenest disappointment and pain, tracing the course of effective discipline, and the assurance is afforded full at the last. There is a final glimpse of her in the familiar upper room with the apostles and other saints, women with the rest, all praying for the Holy Spirit to empower them for service, and it

tells her interest in the essential Gospel kingdom of her Son and promises her the full harvest of redemption.

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